

March 10, 2015

Dear Legislators,

We are writing to tell our story, or more accurately our daughter's story. She will tell you that her name is Isabelle and that she is dyslexic and last year at this time that probably would have been all that she told you about herself. She wouldn't have said that she was beautiful, smart and funny. Or, that she was her daddy's little ladybug. Or, that she was happy. There was a time when she would have, but those times were gone, or at least they were few and far between.

The system had done this to her. The system that has allowed the school district to deny and delay services and true interventions until children like Isabelle have lost hope. We have fought an uphill battle at great personal expense and had to enlist the services of, first an advocate and then a lawyer to force the district to complete the necessary testing and implement what can only be called a poor program to attempt to educate our daughter. The wasted time and resources have had a devastating impact. She had begun to see herself as her disability and nothing else. She felt broken and that she had nothing to offer the world. Why? Simply because there was no law that says defined Dyslexia as a disability and that school systems should be held to a standard about defining it, screening for it, and providing appropriate interventions and services by qualified, trained personnel.

We applaud you for taking the first step by passing legislation last year. Yet, the struggle for these students still continues. Isabelle is now enrolled at a private school, at great personal expense, and is receiving appropriate instruction, by qualified, trained personnel and is making progress. That happy, productive beautiful child is returning to us. Why, clearly these students can thrive given the proper instruction and support.

Our educational system spends a massive amount of time and money on standardized testing to see how children are stacking up but very little on what matters most; professional development for teachers who are the first line of defense in the battle of illiteracy. For the ten to twenty percent of students who suffer from some form of Dyslexia early detection and specific and structured instruction is the key to their success. Why, given a choice, would we not want to see those children become successful and independent adults and citizens?

Thank you,

Jessica and John J. Theisen
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